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WEITERE INFORMATIONEN OK

An unending variety of topics

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

Colonialism just ain't what it used to be

1891, British armed forces stationed in (undivided) India: 90,666
Population of undivided India: 287, 223, 431
Number of Indians per British soldier: 3,168

2006, American troops stationed in Iraq: c. 150,000
Population of Iraq: 26,074,906
Number of Iraqis per American soldier: 174

More here. The ratio of Indians to soldiers of British origin was even higher under the old British East India Company. Furthermore, even though the British East India Company, and later the British Crown, unified and controlled and radically changed the government of India, British civil service in India "had a maximum strength of little more than a thousand," according to Niall Ferguson's colorful book *Empire.*

It's no longer our highly educated and culturally unified mercenaries taking sides in wars between badly divided and largely illiterate native polities, as during the colonial era. National sympathies, stemming mainly from ties of a written language and shared religion, now unify millions of people at a time into cohesive, educated, and highly motivated political blocs that we try to control at our peril. The sophisticated communications and financial networks such nations set up (even if they are stateless) cannot be disrupted for long. A small subset of such megagroups who have particularly strong views can, on the other hand, now severly disrupt traditional occupation and traditional government.

It's not now and never was a problem of "not enough troops on the ground." We are already deploying far more troops in Iraq than is historically normal for a successful overseas occupation. If we continue to try to play Empire, or even just world policeman, it will destroy us.

Posted by Nick Szabo at 3:12 PM

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About Me

Nick Szabo

"A premier thinker about history, law and economics, and the lessons they have for security." -- Adam Shostack, Emergent Chaos

"Szabo comes out with these essays that leave me in awe." -- Brian Dunbar

"Reading material that is eclectic, challenging and endlessly fascinating." -- Sean McGrath, Propylon

"Like most blogs worth my attention, this blog is updated only infrequently. That is because the authors of blogs worth my attention only post when they have something to say that is true, relevant and not already known by their audience. Most of the human race does not have the skill to know when an idea has these three properties. The skill is particularly rare in the fields of politics and economics, which is why this blog is such a rare and valuable thing." -- Richard Hollerith

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4 comments:

Iang said...

You are right to point out that *"not enough troops"* is an inadequate answer, but what was the question?

In anglo military terms, we generally come back to a question of *"what is the mission?"* If we can identify the mission, then we can come up with an answer (and strategy and plan) for both military and administrative issues.

For example, if the mission were to instill democracy, we'd be looking more to a long term administration as discussed in the referenced post; to run the electoral office, the police, the courts, etc, until the conventions had taken root. That would take time. Alternatively, if the mission were regime change, then we'd install the new regime, then run the military in its closed bases for the inevitable counter-coups.

3:00 AM

Ambrosia said...

Part of the problem is the mission keeps changing: destroy the WMD, capture the oil, save women from Islam, build democracy, and on and on. Now it's simply a try to prevent civil war and keep Iran from becoming too powerful. Pop one problem on the head and several more pop up to replace it. At least the East India Company had a simple mission, the bottom line.

1:39 PM

BC said...

Is it not just the bottom line for the US in Iraq?

WMD can't be it; they're not there. They are elsewhere, in places the US does not invade.

Regime change makes no sense as a principal motive.

1. Saddam offered to step down.
2. UN control of what went in and out of the country was not total, but it was extensive.
3. Bush I deliberately undercut the rebellious Kurds and Shiites to allow Saddam to stay in power even after the Gulf War.
4. The US has supported and supports vicious regimes when the government finds it convenient and opposes popular governments when it finds them inconvenient.

Saving women under Islam makes no sense as a reason to invade. Many of the 600,000+ Iraqi fatalities are women and children. Iraqi women that manage to flee the country fill the brothels and nightclubs of neighboring countries. Since this is a natural fate of women in poverty, it wouldn't have taken much imagination to have predicte this for the inevitable refugees of an ongoing occupation.

To establish democracy -- what a bitter irony! Let's look at a few factors:

1. The Bush team's illegal manipulation of two presidential elections
2. The administration's moves against the Bill of Rights in the US, including a) removal of habeas corpus, effectively neutralizing the 4th Amendment b) approval of torture;
3. The US government's consistent opposition to popular governments that oppose the will of large American corporations
4. Here's the big one. If *democracy* involves representative government, it cannot be forced on an entire population. In other words, if I come with guns and bullets and force you to throw a ballot in a box, that's not democracy. (And this is not to say it was the US government that hastened Iraqi elections! It was not.)

So the "build democracy" argument was never relevant.

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The so-called "war on terror" makes no sense as a reason to invade Iraq. Neither the Iraqis nor their government nor anyone in the country had anything to do with 9/11 or Al Qaeda. Moreover, the CIA proposed even before the invasion that the risk of terror to the US would grow.

If one supposes that the government operates out of the self-interest of a small number of people, then its actions become consistent and fairly explicable. George Bush's principal business associates sell Saudi and Texan oil. Iraq cannot ship very much oil, so the price of oil has gone up. American and Saudi oil companies are making big money. So is Venezuela, but you can't have everything. Later, were the US to successfully gain control of the Iraqi oil fields, someone in favor with the administration would again make money by selling that oil.

A large part of the package of "benchmarks" that Congress has "pushed" on the administration is an insistence that the Iraqi government currently maintained by US military presence sign over a large majority of iraqi oil to the US. Will the government or those who will pay off the debt of that war own that oil? It's not likely. It may be dispensed like the construction contracts -- with no bidding, to a corporation with ties to the administration.

So, if the bottom line is consistently money and power, how many soldiers it takes to occupy a territory is crucial. It's a large part of a cost-benefits analysis.

To stop a war, one must make it expensive to the people who are enjoying it.

10:24 PM

BC said...

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To stop a war, one must make it expensive to the people who are enjoying it.

10:25 PM

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